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Special Analysis

CHILE:

Implications of Pinochet's Strategy

President Pinochet's crackdown on public demonstrations and his decision to impose the state of siege on 6 November reflect his desire to restore the Chilean political system to what it was before 1983, when his authority was virtually unchallenged. His actions have set back prospects for an accelerated transition to democracy. By further dividing Chilean society, he probably has strengthened the likelihood that increasing numbers of Chileans will see armed struggle as the only way to establish democratic government.

In adopting his present course, Pinochet is driven by his anger about leftist terrorist actions, which have included bombings of government buildings and attacks on police units. He is also concerned about the ability of radical leftists to foment violent protests in slum areas. In addition, Pinochet sees an opportunity to exploit the evident weakness of moderate opposition groups, which are no longer able to enlist much popular support for their peaceful protests.

Although his effort earlier this month to remove moderate Interior Minister Jarpa was blocked by junta members disturbed by the President's tough methods, Pinochet moved rapidly to restrict the media and public assembly. He also ordered preventive arrests of leftist leaders and slumdweller and deployed security forces in large numbers to forestall antiregime protests.

Evaluating Pinochet's Strategy

Pinochet currently appears to face no serious challenge from the junta or the armed forces in continuing to root out terrorists and to crush violent protests promoted by radical leftists. The middle and upper classes—and probably most of the general population—are not opposed to this aspect of Pinochet's policies, although most Chileans still want an accelerated transition to democracy.

The onset of the summer vacation period in a few weeks favors Pinochet. If he adopts no new measures against democratic opposition groups—whose position evidently was not strengthened by this week's protest—dissidence in the junta probably will dissipate. Moreover, if the President gradually relaxes the state of siege and gives Jarpa leeway to resume the dialogue on transition, Pinochet will once again have fairly solid control by early 1985.

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If Pinochet refuses to relax the state of siege and instead takes new harsh measures against the democratic opposition or continues to resist permitting a resumption of the transition dialogue, his support in the junta and the military will begin to erode. Moderate junta members and some senior military officers would oppose extending the state of siege beyond early next year or any continuation of hardline policies against those who are not terrorists. [REDACTED]

Should Pinochet hold firm, he would risk a confrontation with elements in the military that have the power to oust him. [REDACTED]

Prospects for the Radical Left

By undermining the credibility of centrist political groups, the President will strengthen the appeal of the radical left, which argues that violent tactics offer the only realistic means of challenging the regime. Even without a major increase in recruitment, there is little likelihood of a letup in terrorism in the coming months. [REDACTED]

The principal groups responsible for the recent actions are the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front, which is the armed wing of the Chilean Communist Party, and the pro-Cuban Movement of the Revolutionary Left. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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